

New perspectives on the human form



MAGICAL and accomplished is the best description for the bronze sculptures by Sarah Richards, now on view at artSPACE Durban in Stamford Hill.

It is good to see how this young woman has moved forward and what she has achieved to produce work of such high calibre.

Richards is a versatile artist and in this exhibition, titled *Further*, she shows new paintings and her latest sculptures, all cast in bronze.

Bronze is a wonderful medium – strong, durable through the ages, and aesthetically very pleasing.

Richards studied at Durban University of Technology, majored in sculpture and completed a Master's in fine art (cum laude). She is now a practising artist who lives in the Midlands, near the foundry of Kim Goodwin, who casts her bronzes.

For the past 10 years she has focused on creating bronze sculpture, mostly classical representational work – such as birds, animals and, especially lately, the human form.

This exhibition has taken her on an exploration to further her expertise and deepen her understanding of self, and her relationship to this existence.

Not only has she managed to portray the beauty of the human form, as seen in many European cities and published in books, but she has also made the inside of the larger pieces different by imbedding things that are very meaningful to her (and perhaps others) – like a feather, a rose, a shell.

But they are so delicately blended that in some instances it is hardly noticeable.

Richards's figures are quite arresting. Please do yourself a favour and view her sculptures. Some are life-size figures, but there is also a series of very small bronzes that cast intriguing shadows on the wall. Very pleasing, indeed.

"I must create three-dimensional art

works," says Richards.

"The beauty and wonder of the human form in sculptures have always had a profound effect on me. Since a young age I have had a desire to explore what I see and feel by creating large works with my hands.

"I use a Plasticine (wax-based) medium to model my sculptures, before casting into bronze, exploring the potential that this medium affords: moulding, melting and carving."

Bronze sculptures are cast as hollow structures no matter what the size, and the innate strength in the bronze has allowed Richards to explore the human form from various perspectives: the physical body, the internal confusions of mind, mingled with emotions and how this mind/body entity influences the world it engages with.

The surface texture reflects light and creates an illusion of life and movement.

Richards has chosen the male figure because, to her, it represents a male aspect she finds in herself which, she says, "is intrinsically masculine in nature: organised, achieving, linear, strong, physical, athletic, yearning to be free".

Her work explores the male figure and psyche with sensual, edgy flair. In contrast to this, according to Richards, is her feminine aspect, which is connected to the flow of life and the natural world.

That's why, I think, she puts random objects in her work, combining these with drawings and relief modelling.

Her paintings play a supportive role, acting out the expressions of the sculptural figure studies, placing the human form in tumultuous emotion. These paintings offer a bird's-eye view, showing the world from her perspective.

Meanwhile, in the middle gallery at artSPACE is an exhibition titled *extraOrdinary*, featuring photographs by Sally Giles. They are not just snapshots, but, on first impression, look like they are.

A few years ago, Giles spent months in informal settlements shooting a documentary about shack dwellers. In this series she asked herself what "ordinary" people did at weekends, while on holiday or at work.

This motivated her to photograph with humour, or a wry look, ordinary people going about their daily lives.



Works by Sarah Richards. The near-lifesize bronze at the top of the page is titled *Leap Further*. The work above is titled *Mind Body*.



Detail from a series of small sculptures by Sarah Richards mounted on the wall at artSPACE Durban, casting very interesting shadows.